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ABSTRACT

Although many scholars have regarded Dahomey as the homeland of the Haitian people, this analysis may not withstand rigorous historical and linguistic scrutiny. The Haitian expression "Neg Danhonmen" (blacks from Dahomey) is not primarily an historical reference but a mythical one that looks back to a gloricus past and presents itself today as a vehicle of ethical standards and social control. Danhormen is a symbolic term that reflects the collective consciousness of the Haitian people and evokes the basic concerns and motifs informing Haitian life and values. (WP)

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Africa in Diaspora: The Myth of Dahomey in Haiti

The strange Haitian expression of Neg Danhonmen (Blacks from Dahomey) refers to a mythical language to support a code of honor, a system of ethics, and a decision of resistance to the process of dehumanization in the slavery system of the Caribbean exile. Rather than a historical and actual reference, it relates to the broad mythical theme of a lost paradise, and presents itself as a form of social control.

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Africa in Diaspora: The Myth of Dahomey in Haiti[1]

Guerin C. Montilus

As far as African traditions are concerned, Haiti has been considered as a microcosm of Dahomey[2] in the Caribbean Black diaspora. The late Dr. Jean Price-Mars was among the first anthropologists to refer to Haitian Voodoo[3] as an offspring of Dahomean Voodoo.[4] Price-Mars referred to Dahomey saying, "there is a religion with the same structure and elements as our Voodoo" (p. 99). He added the, "in Dahomey some deities and spirits in general, are given the name vodun" (p. 99). To support his statement, he quoted A. Le Herissé,[5] saying this author reported "some translations of rituals, formulas, word for word, just as most common expressions used in the 'language' of our voodooist" (p. 99). Price-Mars then quoted the examples of Herisse in Fongbe, the language of one of the main ethnic groups of Lower Dahomey, with the translation; "Spirit is God's thing," and "God possesses spirit" (p. 99).[6] Herissé's examples were hard evidence for Price-Mars of the Dahomean origin of Haitian Voodoo. Price-Mars then went on to analyze the process by which the slav s adopted rites from Christianity, the religion of their masters, and brought into effect, the current syncretism[7] through which Haitian Voodoo is so well known.

Several ideas emerging after Price-Mars have conformed to the thought of this great master.[8] Alfred Métraux, for example, speaking on the "History of the Voodoo" (p. 25-57), took such a point as he wrote, "Haitians and Dahomeans look very alike" (p. 28).[9] Métraux then went on to analyze the cultural references of Haiti to Dahomey as the motherland of the Haitian people (p. 28). In addition, there is also the language of the masses who claim proudly to be Nèg Danhonmen,[10] that is, Blacks from Dahomey. There is then some consensus that Dahomey formed the semantic base of Haitian culture. This has already lead to some misinterpretations about Haitian culture and has brought some sociological consequences such as the cultural isolationism of Haiti which is already an island. This present study intends to discuss the validity and limit of this concept of Dahomey as it is related to Haitian Voodoo and culture.

The belief in Dahomey as homeland and motherland of Haitian Voodoo, and even of the Haitian people and culture altogether,[11] hides much more than it reveals, and may inspire some oversimplification. This geographical reference itself tends to create confusion. For example, the name Dahomey refers to two different entities, the pre-colonial and the colonial territories. The pre-colonial territory, named Danhonmen was the kingdom of Fon. with the capital, Agbomen.[12] This was the territory studied by Herissé; its society, social institutions, system of land tenure, religion etc. This is also the territory to which the Haitian collective memory refers, as the Haitian masses, descendants of the former slaves, claim Danhonmen to be their land of origin.[13]

It has become the synonym of a lost paradise and a mythical land of reference for their system of positive values. It does not coincide at all with the current and modern country of Dahomey, expanded after the colonial conquest by France in 1894.[14]

The geographic concept of Dahomey to situate the origin of Haitian Voodoo then is inoperative. We had better try a linguistic approach. The worship of vodun[15] is known among the Adja-speaking people.[16] Today, they have been spread throughout the lowlands of southeastern Ghana, Lower Togo, and middle and Lower Dahomey. These Adja-speaking people form the following sub-linguistic groups; Agonlin, Avizo, Ewe,[17] Fon, Gun, Hweda, Katafon, Maxinu, Minan, Torinu, Tofinu, Watchi, Wemennu,[18] etc.

Roberto Pazzi[19] after an extensive pilgrimage and fieldwork, and a broad linguistic research among the Adja-speaking people spread throughout the lowlands along the Coast of Guinea concluded, the Adja came out of a crossbreeding of the Yoruba and the Alu. The Yoruba migrated from Oyo in Nigeria around 1000 AD. The Alu were the occupants and claimed to be aboriginal. They migrated from the west, in the Blu region, in southern current Ghana The Alu then were the occupants of this plateau of Tado in the valley of Mono, in middle current Togo. They were blacksmiths (p. 33-34), sharing with the surrounding people in the western land the same technological tradition of the work with iron, having the hammer (zu) and the anvil (zukpe) as the mythical symbol and emblem of their ancestors (p. 31-33). The Alu lived in the area also called Alu after their name (p. 33). The Yoruba came and settled in the neighborhood named Ajace,

meaning "the Adja took up their residence here" (p. 37). Through an alliance with a branch of the Alu, the new comers from the east founded subsequently the kingdom of Tado, better known as the kingdom of Adja, with a royal seat, the king's stool, zinkpo, as a main symbol.[20] According to Pazzi, this alliance was born through the current royal family Azanu, living at Tado. They have been the depository of this historical tradition (huenuxo) (p. 37).

Later, under the pressure of insecurity, and surely over-population,[21] the Adja migrated to the land in the south and especially in the east, constituting the current Adja sub-ethnic groups in eastern Ghana, southern Togo, and Lower Dahomey to the border of Nigeria, as said before. Each of them has held the tradition of their migration embedded in a flourished mythology, and claimed both Tado[22] as their native land and Oyo or the east as a remote and previous place of origin.[23]

Thus, it was there at Tado, these Adja-speaking people developed the original culture of vodun from cultural elements originated for the greater part from the Yoruba tradition, in the east, and the remainder from the west through a double migration to the same common point; the plateau of Tado in the valley of Mono. This culture came from an alliance of iron technology and the genius of city development. Throughout their subsequent migration, these sub-ethnic groups brought from Tado the same core of religious structure, mythical concepts and semantic values as a common social heritage which migrated afterwards to Haiti in the Caribbean diaspora through the slave

trade.

Mawu is the supreme and ultimate (ḍaxo) power (aceẹ).[24] He owns (ḍo) the universe (wẹkẹ) as a whole (bi).[25] Vodun are invisible beings (nuḍoyẹsume) and mediators (ana) between Mawu and human beings (gbẹtọ). They are aceẹ kpẹvi, junior power. Gbẹtọ, human beings, are struggling in the precarious condition of the worldly-life (gbẹtome) to realize their life-time program (biọwa) on-earth (gbẹme). This fulfillment is their cultural salvation accomplished in the-wordly-life (gbẹtome). Fate or destiny (biọwa) then, is the life-history of an individual including "the notion of justice" and moral behavior.[27] Vodun as invisible beings (nuḍoyẹsume) partly like human beings (gbẹtọ), and partly as Mawu, the supreme power (aceẹ ḍaxo), bridge the gap as mediators (ana) between the other world and this life, as it occurs in any structure of religion.[28] Vodun rule (kpa aceẹ) and watch (kpe nukun) over the world (gbẹme) for the sake of human beings (gbẹtọ). They have received their authority (aceẹ gbe) from Mawu, and have their function (azọ) in this-world (gbẹme). However, Mawu never interferes with their role (azọme).[29] Between Vodun and gbẹtọ (human beings), there is a convenant of services (nunsinsen) in terms of gift (prayer and sacrifice) and counter-gift (human well-being).[30]

Ancestors (tọgbo) and other departed (kulutọ) constitute an invisible community tied to their offsprings (vi) and descendants (vivuvivu)[31]. These are the visible parts of the same and unique extended family (hennu). Both parts of the community

are related to each other. There is a strong connection between the gbẹtome (village of life) and the kutome (village of death). For the visible community (hennu) is a continuity of the beings (nyi) of the forefathers (tọgbo). The living are the extension of the names (nyi)[32] of the departed (kulutọ). These are represented through the symbols named asen.[33] The asen are one-legged metallic very small circular tables. They are also the ritual altars (kpe) used to make offerings (nuḍuḍu) to both departed (kulutọ) and vodun. The asen of the departed (kulutọ) are gathered altogether in a hut (xọ) called asen xọ (hut of asen). This shrine (asen xọ) is situated within the compound (hennu xue) among the extended family (hennu). Thus, the family community (hennu) lives (non) together as a whole (bi), departed (kuluto) and descent (vi and vivuvivu).

The magic power (bo)[34] is both defensive (ḍo ji) and offensive (jẹ do). It is gained through some recipe held by the botọ (bo maker). The magic power (bo) is always considered as a product of knowledge (nyoen) of natural law, particularly the virtue of leaves (aman)[35] communicated with the secrecy of fine art to the hunters (gbetọ) in the forest (zun) by vodun Aziza.[36] This knowledge (nyoen) is capital among the Adja since it is connected with the medical art (amansin) and the diet (nuḍuḍu). Medicine is called amansin, literally "water (sin) of leaves (aman)". Medical leaves (azongbleman)[37] are also related to vodun as effect to cause. The leaves (aman) represent the power (acẹ) of vodun. Each vodun has his leaf or leaves (aman) as his symbols. Knowing a vodun is getting into the secrecy of his leaves

(aman), for vodun is aman,[38] according to a saying among the Adja-Fon in Lower Dahomey. Haitian Voodoo in the Caribbean diaspora held the Adja tradition in matters of botanical knowledge referring to folk medicine, magic and diet.[39] There is a particular affinity between Haitian lwa[40] and trees (pie-bwa). These are their dwelling place and are very often scattered over the back yards (laku) to protect (siveye) the habitat (lakay) of their worshippers (sẹvitẹ). These ritual trees are called pie-bwa-sevi, pie-bwa-repozwa, or pie-bwa-mistẹ.[41]

This structure of beliefs belonged to the Adja-speaking people as a whole, and overlapped the territories of the former kingdom of Danhonmen and the colonial and independent Dahomey. This concept of Danhonmen then, as it is used in the Haitian language, and in the structure of Haitian Voodoo, is far from being a grammatical or syntaxical frame of reference. It is the same for other geographical terms as Lafrik Ginen (Africa Guinea)[42], Congo[43] or Rada[44]. They are only lexical references for the Haitian collective memory, and serve as a mythical support for the system of mass values. Danhonmen only refers to the name of the most powerful among the Adja kingdoms in the Gulf of Benin. Among these kingdoms there were the three brothers, Alada or Adanhusa (the elder), Danhonmen and Xọgbonu (Porto Novo), (the two younger).

Other Adja kingdoms existed such as Jakin (Godomen), Tọri, Savi, Popo along the southern coast; the kingdom of Maxi with the capital, Savalu at the northern border of the kingdom of Danḥonmen. All of them were Adja, and their members were vodun worshippers (vodunsento). All of them sent part of their pantheon and their rituals to Haiti. For example, from the remote country of Maxi, members of the royal family of the Gbagiḍi of Savalu came to exile and to the Haitian diaspora with their vodun Azaka becoming Papa Zaka or lwa Azaka Mede in Haiti. He was the owner of the land in the kingdom of Maxi. In Haiti, he became the powerful lwa of agriculture, the lord (mẹt) and sovereign of the country and the countrymen, and the ruler of the fields and harvests, from which the name "Papa" came. The Maxinu also brought their vodun Dan Ayiḍohwẹḍo who was well known by the other Adja sub-ethnic groups even before their exile in the New World. Dan Ayiḍohwẹḍo became the Haitian lwa Dan Bala Wedo well known by his form as a serpent (dan), as in his original country. The Hweda of Savi brought their vodun Agbe Tọwoyo[45] to Haiti. This vodun became the Haitian lwa Agwe Tawoyo, sovereign of the sea and the navigation. He held the same habitat as in the kingdom of Savi in southern Dahomey. The remote island of Agonvẹ in Azili lake at the southern border between Dahomey and Nigeria, sent to Haiti their male vodun Azili, the mythical landlord and generator of this lake. This vodun Azili probably migrated through a branch of Agonlinu migrated at Ouidah in ancient time. Vodun Azili became the beautiful mulatto woman Ẹzili-Fweda, called after the

former name of Ouidah.[46] Lwa Ezili-Fweda is also called Ezili-Danto or Ezili-Danhonmen after the mythical name of the famous West African kingdom. This vodun in changing sex in Haiti syncretized with the Yoruba orisa Yemoja from Nigeria, inhabitant of fresh and salt water. However, the Haitian Ezili held the old habitat of Agonve, and preferred fresh water dwelling. This extreme case of Ezili syncretizing her mythology with a Yoruba orisa shows once more the difficulties in speaking of Haitian Voodoo as originating in Dahomey, let alone the proper Dahomey.

One of the most important functions of myth is to create a consensus in a community, to produce a language which transcends the human condition, and gives it meaning.[47] In this case, Danhonmen as a geographical place has become a social symbol inspired the Haitian masses, and has made them able to formulate a code of honor, norms of morality, and even a revolutionary program. This shift of significance generated the war of independence, 1791-1804, and gave cohesion to the victorious community of masses.[48] The prestige of the Adja kingdom in Benin, after this war, exaggerated[49] undoubtedly under the effect of exile and mythical generation, became a very attractive, efficient and meaningful pole of support for both spiritual and moral values. As a myth in Haitian Voodoo, Danhonmen is then a symbolic and figurative term to which the collective memory refers each time the social structure makes the request. It relates the most essential truths of Haitian life such as freedom, honor, and fidelity. This mythical concept expressed by means of powerful images, something of the problems which obsessed the Africans

during slavery in San Domingo; courage, resistance, force, faithfulness, and solidarity.[50] This explains the success and radiance of this name, and its use in the Haitian daily language. As a social symbol, Danhonmen has enjoined and prescribed. It has had a political function in the Haitian community. It has compelled respect. This name has become an emblem and an injunction for the people.[51] It then presents itself as a form of social control among the Haitian masses. The mistake would be to take this word literally and historically. This would go beyond the limits of the Haitian speaker's ritual process of reenactment.[52]

NOTES

[1]The word "myth" has been used with many different meanings. In this study, the word refers to the following definition: "A myth is a symbolic story (or character) which teaches a lesson and which is fascinating to a human collectivity for which it expresses and clarifies an essential aspect of existence, either by justifying a situation, a characteristic of the human condition, or by proposing an active approach, an example to imitate (or not to imitate) a moral norm or a revolutionary plan " André Dabezies, "Ancient and Modern Versions of the Faust Myth," in Lives of Doctor Faust, ed. Eric Bockstael (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1976), p. 1. See esp. "What is a Myth Today," p. 1-2. Roland Barthes noted, "Myth is a system of communication . . . It is a mode of signification, a form . . . Since myth is a type of speech, everything can be a myth provided it is conveyed by a discourse." See "Myth Today," in Roland Barthes, Mythologies, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), p. 109-59. It is in this way the name of Dahomey is considered as a myth in respect to its use in Haitian community. See esp. Claude Levi-Strauss, "La Structure des mythes," in his Anthropologie structurale (Paris: Plon, 1958), p. 227-56.

[2]The current name of this West African country is People's Republic of Benin. This present study has kept the former name Dahomey for the sake of cultural tradition, historical purposes and anthropological convenience. For the origin of this name Dahomey, see Robert Cornevin, Histoire du Dahomey (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1962), p. 95-96.

[3]This word "Voodoo" has produced confusion, and has appeared in many spellings. See Harold Courlander, "Vodoun in Haitian Culture," in his Religion and Politics in Haiti, ed. H. Courlander and Remy Bastien, 2nd. ed. (Washington, DC: Institute for Cross-Cultural Research, 1966), p. 25, n.1. In this paper, when it is a question of religion, the spelling adopted follows the Western tradition. For the concept of Voodoo meaning religion is Western. However, when this word carries the original meaning of the West African concept, the spelling in this text follows the African phonetics, vodun. See below n.15.

[4]Jean Price-Mars, Ainsi parla l'oncle, Nouvelle édition (Montreal: Lemeac, 1973), p. 99.

[5]A. Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume du Dohomey, (Paris: Emile Larose, Librairie-Editeur, 1911).

[6]Here is the quotation from Le Herissé:

Vodoun e gni Mahounou
Spirit is a thing of God

Mahou oue do Vodoun
God possesses the spirit

Price-Mars, p. 99; see Le Herisse, p. 96.

[7]The use of the concept of syncretism is common in the analysis of Haitian Voodoo and other African religions of Latin America in their mixing with Christianity. No research has gone farther in this analysis. See for example the tenors of the theme, Melville J. Herskovits in his The Myth of the Negro Past (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), p. 184 and Passim. Herskovits spoke expressively of syncretism as such a fundamental mechanism "in the acculturative process undergone by New World Negroes" (p. 184). Alfred Métraux used the same concept as a model in his Haitian Voodoo trans. by Hugo Charteris ("Shocken Books", New York: Shocken Books Inc., 1972); see esp. his analysis "Voodoo and Christianity," p. 323-58. Roger Bastide also used this concept in his Les religions africaines au Brésil: vers une sociologie des interprétations de civilisations (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1960). See esp. his analysis "Les problèmes du syncrétisme religieux," in his Les religions africaines, p. 362-96. However, in Western tradition, this concept has a negative connotation. Coming from its etimology the word implies an incoherent mixture of heterogeneous elements, and refers to confusionism. It then deserves reserve because it cannot account for the complexity of the anthropological phenomenon which has occurred in those religions under the pressure of slavery or colonization. Roger Bastide himself expressed this criticism. See his "Les Christ noirs," forward to Martial Sinda Le messianisme congolais et ses incidences politiques (Paris: Payot, 1972) p. 9.

[8]This is particularly true of the Ecole d'Ethnologie d'Haiti later becoming Faculty d'Ethnologie d'Haiti. See e.g. Michel Aubourg, "Survivances dahoméennes dans le folklore haïtien," Bulletin du Bureau d'Ethnologie de la Republique d'Haïti, 4, No. 29 (1963), 30-36.

[9]Métraux added: "Yet the culture of Dahomey survives not only in the domains of religion and esthetics, and in certain aspects of economic life, but also in such subtle forms of behavior as gestures of facial expression. . .", p. 28.

[10]Métraux referred to this feeling as he said, "The Haitian peasant thinks of Guinea and virtually looks upon himself as an original inhabitant there," p. 28.

[11]For example, Alfred Métraux completed his analysis of similarities between Haitians and Dahomeans, saying: "Although the vocabulary of Haitian Creole, with the exception of a few African and Spanish words, is entirely French, the phonetics and grammar have much in common with those of the Dahomean and Nigerian languages." Haitian Voodoo, p. 28. This question seems more complex, see e.g. Yves Dejean, Eske Bouki ak Malis konn grame (New York: Newsletter Printing & Publishing Co., 1977).

[12]For some ancient references on this kingdom, see Robert Norris, Memoirs of the Reign of Bossa Ahadee, King of Dahomey, An Inland Country of Guinea, To Which Are Added The Author's Journey to Abomey, the Capital; and a Short Account of the African Slave Trade (London: Printed for W. Loundes, No. 77, Fleet-Street, 1789; Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1968); Frederick E. Forbes, Dahomey and the Dahomans: Being the Journals of Two Missions to the King of Dahomey, and Residence at his Capital, in the Years 1849 and 1850, 2 vols. (New York: J.J. Augustin, 1938); more recent, Paul Mercier, "The Fon of Dahomey," in Daryll Forde, African Worlds: Studies in the Cosmological Ideas and Social Values of African Peoples (London: Oxford University Press, 1954) p. 210-234; Cornevin, 1962; W.J. Argyle, The Fon of Dahomey: A History and Ethnography of the Old Kingdom (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966); for a critical approach, see I.A. Akinjogbin, Dahomey and its Neighbours, 1708-1818 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967); and for the study of the political power in this kingdom by an insider and from the point of view of the oral tradition see, Maurice Ahanhanzo Glele, Le Danxome: Du pouvoir Aja à la nation Fon (Paris: Nubia, 1974).

[13]Ghislain Gouraige said there has been a discomfort among the Blacks in diaspora of the New World, and a need to define themselves. This has come from the constant feeling of exile. See his La diaspora d'Haiti et l'Afrique (Ottawa: Editions Naaman, 1974), p. 7-9.

[14]See H. De Santi, Du Danhome au Benin-Niger (Paris: Larose, 1945); Cornevin, 1962; Jean Pliya, Histoire: Dahomey (Cotonou: Jean Pliya, 1967).

[15]The concept, vodun is Adja. It means a spiritual being (nudoyesume), considered as an invisible agent of extraordinary events. See Paul Hazoumé, Le Pacte de Sang au Dahomey (Paris: Institut d'Ethnologie, 1937), p. 2, n.1; For a compilation of historical data regarding the nature of vodun, see Pierre Verger, "Définition des Orisa et Vodun," In his Notes sur le culte des Orisa et Vodun à Bahia, la Baie de tous les saints, au Brésil et à l'ancienne Côte des Esclaves en Afrique (Dakar: Ifan, 1957), p. 25-70.

[16]About the Adja-speaking people, See Hazoumé, p.2, n.7; Jacques Bertho, "Adja-Tado, races et langues du Bas-Dahomey et du Bas-Tago," Grands lacs, No. 61 (1946), 57-59. Jacques Bertho, "Notes accompagnant la carte de la repartition de la population dans la zone cotière entre le Niger et la Volta," in Première conférence internationale des Africanistes de l' Ouest 1945, vol. II, 1951, p. 115-117; I.A. Akinjogbin, 1967; and his "The Expansion of Oyo and the Rise of Dahomey, 1600-1800" in ed. J.F.A. Ajayi and Michael Crowder, History of West Africa, 2nd ed., Vol. I (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), p. 373-412.

[17]The Ewe is a sub-ethnic group of the Adja. The Adja are "often erroneously called Ewe" (Mercier, p. 210); see v.g. H. Baumann et D. Westermaun, Les peuples et les civilisations de l' Afrique trans. by L. Homburger (Paris: Payot, 1978), p. 246-347; F. N.'Sougan Agblemagnon quoting D. H. Westermaun, A Study of Ewe Language (New York, 1906, p. 13), endorsed the error of this author; see his Sociologie des sociétés orales d'Afrique noire: Les Ewe du Sud-Togo (Paris: Mouton & Co., 1969), p. 36-39. See also George Peter Murdock, "The Ewe Cluster," in his Africa: Its Peoples and Their Culture History (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1959), p. 252-253. Jacques Bertho noted, the term "Ewe" was mainly related to geomophology, and was understood to mean plain. It was only by extension, the word was applied to all inhabitants of the plain of Togo. Bertho added most of the people of this part of Togo are related. However, the word "Ewe" could not give an account of their ethnic relationship. This word does not have any ethnic significance. Using the word in such a way could produce "serious confusion." See J. Bertho, "La parenté des Yoruba aux peuplades de Dahomey et Togo," Africa, 19, No. 2 (1949), 121.

[18]See R.P.B. Segurola, "Aja," in his Dictionnaire Fon-Francais, 2nd ed. (Porto-Novo: Centre catéchétique, 1968) Vol. I, p. 32.

[19]Notes d'histoire des peuples Aja, Ewe, Gen et Fon depuis les origines jusqu' au siècle passé (Lome: Roneoed document, 1973).

[20]The royal stool was a very strong tradition among the Akan, the Western neighbours of the Adja. See Eva L. R. Meyerowitz, The Sacred State of the Akan (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1951), p. 59 and passim. However, the Adja did not elaborate such a rich ritual around the stool, zinkpo, as the Akan. However, the zinkpo became the symbol of authority of every main Adja official such as the head of the extended family, hennugan, or the vodun priest, vodunnon.

[21]See Akinjogbin, 1976, p. 378. Akinjogbin noted, ". . . One tradition relates that . . . Tado was subjected to constant raids by a group of people who used Akatampo (short guns). It is therefore, probable that another important cause

of migration was the need of security . . . there may have been geographical reasons as well. The Tado region was not as fertile as the area lying eastward. With increase in the population there may have been a real need to seek more fertile lands. . .", p. 378.

[22]The Fon of Allada, for example, claimed to be Sadonu (Tadonu), that is, "people of Sado, (Tado)." Sadonu is their clan name.

[23]Pazzi, p. 26.

[24]This present study uses the Adja-Fon concepts. The supreme power is called ace daxo (senior power). In contrast, the subordinate power is named ace kpevi (junior power). The concept of power is fundamental to understand the Adja pantheon, and their social and religious structures. This concept of power might be considered as the most important concept in anthropology of religion as far as the interpretation of the relationship between God and man is concerned. For example, the Adja God raises his sovereign power over the whole world (see n.31). He is the ace daxo. The subordinate power (ace kpevi) is the other hierarchical power, including all humans granted by some authority.

[25]The Adja-Fon of Allada say of Mawu:

Mawu o,
Mawu,

e do weke bi,
He owns the whole universe,

atin kpo kan kpo,
tree and liana.

This comprehensive definition includes the animated and inanimated beings (nu) existing in the universe (weke). The Adja-Fon concept of God insisting upon the ownership of Mawu, is somewhat different from what Claude Rivière presented as the Fon idea of Mawu. According to Rivière, Mawu has been considered as generating the cosmos in its material part ("générateur du cosmos en ce qu'il a de matériel"). This view does not seem conformed to the Adja tradition. See Claude Rivière, "Mawu, l'insurpassable chez les Eve du Togo" in Anthropos 74, 1979, 1/2, p. 25.

[26]See Meyer Fortes, Oedipus and Job in West African Religion (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1959) esp. ch. III, "The Notion of Fate in West Africa," p. 19-25; ch. VI, "Good Destiny, Ancestor Spirits and parents," p. 41-55.

[27]Fortes, p. 19.

[28]See Edmund R. Leach, "Genesis as Myth," in Myth and Cosmos: Readings in Mythology and Symbolism, ed. John Middleton (Garden City, New York: American Museum Source Books in Anthropology, 1967); and esp. "Binary structure of Myth," p. 3-5 where the author explains the meaning of the concepts of "intermediaries" and "mediators" as a "bridge between Man and God," (p. 3); in the case of vodun, see Maupoil, "Caracteres," in his Geomancie, p. 57-63.

[29]A hennugan (head of the extended family) said, when a vodun hit gbeto (human being) and if this gbeto goes to complain of the vodun to Mawu, the latter then says, "Gbeto, sit down here;" and he adds, "Vodun, keep doing your work (azo towe)." This explains the unconditional power of vodun.

[30]Marcel Mauss, "Essai sur le don. Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques," in his Anthropologie et Sociologie, 3rd ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1966), p. 145-279.

[31]For the concept of ancestor and their link with their surviving lineage, see Fortes, p. 41-55.

[32]Surprisingly "being" is the same word as name, nyi. The name is the being. "A name is much more than a simple process of designation and identification of an individual, it is a fundamental element of his personality. . ." P.A., "Nom," in Dictionnaire des civilisations africaines, ed. Georges Balandier and Jacques Maquet (Paris: Fernand Hazan, editeur, 1968), p. 298-299; See also Bohumil Holas, "Remarques sur la valeur sociologique du nom dans les sociétés traditionnelles de l'ouest africain," Journal de la Société des Africanistes, Paris, 1953, 1/2, 77-86; Maurice Houis, Les noms individuels chez les Mossi (Dakar: Ifan, 1963). This expression of two concepts, "being" and "name," by the same word "nyi", related to the ancestors is particularly true here; for the offsprings (vi) are considered the continuity of both the name and being of their parents. This means "mutual interdependence and obligation," Fortes, p. 62. See Fortes, "Justice, Responsibility and the Ancestor Cult," p. 60-64. Basile-Toussaint Kassou, Sê et Gbê: Dynamique de l'existence chez les Fon, Dahomey, Dissertation, Sorbonne, Paris, 1971; see esp. his "La collectivisation de la vie," p. 277- 85.

[33]The study of Jacqueline Delange, Arts et peuples de l'Afrique noire (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), p. 72-73; esp. Kossou, "La vie ancestrale," p. 285-302; Cornevin, p. 218.

[34]See "Magic and Charms" in Herskovits, vol. II, p. 256-288; Parrinder, 1949; Cornevin, p. 222; Maximilien Quénum, Au pays des Fon (Paris: Larose, 1938).

[35]This knowledge of leaves (aman) is so important that the Adja-Fon for example, in Dahomey made it as an integral and essential part of wisdom. Curiously, wisdom is called in Adja-Fongbe, nunyoen. That means knowledge (nyoen) of the thing (nu). This nu (thing) is fundamentally the leaves (aman); medical and magic leaves; offensive and defensive. Speaking of defensive magic related to the leaves (aman), the Adja-Fon use the concept gbo. Gbo means to heal. Offensive magic essentially consists of the making of the opponent sick (azon). That is, preventing him from being active. The Fon explained; this person cannot work to support his family. It is to attack him in his most vital interest. See Honorat Aguessy, "Religions africaines comme effet et source de la civilisation de l'oralite," in ed. Alioune Diop Les religions africaines comme source de valeurs de civilisation, Colloque de Cotonou 16-22 Août 1970 (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1972), p. 25-49, and esp. "Base scientifique de la religion africaine," p. 42-45; for the Adja-Ewe, see Madeline Manoukian, The Ewe-Speaking People of Togoland and the Gold Coast (London: International African Institute, 1952), p. 50-52; for the Adja-Gun, see Roger Brand, Plantes medicinales en usage chez les Gun (Cotonou: The Author, 1972); for the Adja heritage in botany in Dahomey, see Maurice E. Bosseaux, Plantes cultivées et spontanées du Dahomey, 2 vols. (Porto-Novo: L'Association Dahoméenne des Amis de la Nature, 1965); for a more general study, see J.M. Dalziel, The Useful Plants of Tropical West Africa (London: The Crown Agents for the Colonies, 1937).

[36]This vodun Aziza lives in the forest (zun).

[37]Azongbleman; literally - leaves (aman) to spoil (gble) illness (azon). In other words, "Healing leaves."

[38]The Adja-Fon of Allada say:

Vodun-on, aman we nyi
Vodun, leaves, they are.

That is to say, the efficiency of the medical leaves is the symbol of the power of vodun. See esp. Bosseaux, Vol. I, "Plantes à usage rituel," p. 226-248.

[39]See J.B. Romain, "Connaissance des végétaux," in his Quelques moeurs et contumes des paysans haïtiens (Port-au-Prince: Imprimerie de l'Etat, 1959), p. 85-96.

[40]Lwa, a word from the Yoruba language that the Haitians apply as a collective name to the Adja vodun. The anthropologists and linguists generally made the word lwa coming from the Yoruba term Oluwa meaning master, lord. See v.g. Suzanne and Jean Combaire-Sylvain, "Survivances africaines dans le vocabulaire religieux d'Haïti," in Etudes dahoméennes,

XIV (1955), p. 13. However, one can wonder whether the word lwa referring to the invisible beings (lespri) of the Haitian pantheon does not rather come from the Ewe word luwo. Luwo refers to the shadow as the principle of personality. The significant point is luwo, referring to the concept of invisible being, spirit, soul, is a concept identical to the nature of the lwa as spirit in Haitian mythology. As a matter of fact, the Haitians under the cultural influence of Western Christianity define lwa as spirit ; "Lwa-yo, se lespri yo ye," (lwa are spirits), they say. The same concept, spirit, is applied to soul, god, and the other invisible beings. This mode of thought is closer to the Ewe concept of luwo than the Yoruba concept of oluwa. However, the Yoruba concept of oluwa as master is also relevant in reference to the socio-historical origin of Haitian masses, as slaves. This new hypothesis of luwo could be enlightening as to some etymological research. See A.B. Ellis, The Yoruba-Speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa, 2nd ed. (London: Curzon Press, 1974), p. 125; G.K. Nukunya, "Some Underlying Beliefs in Ancestor Worship and Mortuary Rites among the Ewe," in La notion de personne en Afrique noire, ed. Germaine Dieterlen (Paris: Centre National de Recherche Scientifique, 1973), p. 125.

[41]See J. Verschueren, La République d'Haiti: Le culte du vaudoux, vol. III (Paris: p. Lethielleux, 1948), p. 142-145. Romain, p. 85-96; esp. Métraux , p. 81, 92, 210.

[42]Lafrik Ginen (Afrika Guinea) is semantically equivalent to Danhonmen. The expression Neg Danhonmen has as its synonym Neg Ginen, with the same semantical value. I have been told the Blacks in Trinidad also identify themselves as natives of Ginen.

[43]Congo is in contrast with Danhonmen and Ginen. Congo is the land of betrayal. The slaveholders in San Domingo, drew out of the Congo slaves their servants. They had the reputation to be more gentle, and seemed to show less resistance to slavery than did the slaves from the Coast of Guinea, generally sullen, rebellious, and unsubdued. In addition to that, they were more acculturated in their behavior. This social distance between the Guinean and the Bantu, made the Bantu (Congo) as treacherous. Neg Congo still means traitor in Haiti. See Milo Rigaud, "Le role du vaudou dans l'independance d'Haiti," Presence africaine, fevrier-Mai 1958, p. 43-68, esp. p. 46. There was also the ethnic factor that was the pliability of the slaves' mind to the phenomenon of acculturation in the encounter with the Western cultures. Roger Bastide noted: "Ethnically speaking, syncretism becomes more noticeable when turn form the Dahomeans (Casa das Minas) to the Yoruba, and from them to the Bantu, who are the most susceptible of all to external influences." African Civilisations in the New World, trans. Peter Green ("Harper Torchbooks;" New York: Harper and

Row, 1971), p. 153-54. In addition to the ethnic factor, Jean Price-Mars raised a historical factor, the Congo, who are Bantu, had earlier contact with the Western world through the first discoveries of Equatorial Africa by the Portuguese in the early 15th century. They then had a slight varnish of Christianity which explained more affinity for Western cultures. Ainsi parla l'oncle, p. 229. This was interpreted as a surrender to slavery. The word Congo then has a pejorative connotation among the Haitians.

[44]Rada occurs in the Haitian language in the following expressions, lwa Rada, rit Rada, and dans Rada, referring to the native place of this part of the Haitian Voodoo, myth, rite, and dance. In the expression lwa Rada, Rada is a synonym of Danhonmen, in terms of reference. It then has the same semantic value as this last term. However, the question rose, from where Rada came? What was the original reference before this transfer of meaning? It has been suggested the term refers to Allada. Comhaire-Sylvain, argued that, "in early XVIIIth Century, most of the slaves imported to San Domingo (Haiti) probably came from Ouidah, port of the kingdom of Allada. According to Moreau de Saint-Mery, all Blacks originating from the Coast of Slaves, were known as Arada" (p. 16). This has not solved the problem. First, Ouidah has been well known not as a port of the kingdom of Allada, but of the kingdom of Sahe or Savi founded by the Hweda. See v. 9 "Casimir Agbo dit Alidji", Histoire de Ouidah du XVI^{e} au XX^{e} siecle (Avignon: Les Presses universelles, 1959), esp. p. 11-15. Secondly the identification of Rada with Allada is a delicate matter. Rada could have come from Arda, and referred to the Kingdom of Arda; Henri Labouret and Paul Rivet reported: "The Kingdom of Arda was already known since 1658. Reports and maps mentionned it under various forms, changing with the period and the nationality of the authors. The most ancient document mentionned Arda. From XVI th Century, there were more usually, Ardra among the Portugueses, Arder among the Deutchs, Ardrah among the British, and Ardre and Ardres among the French." See Le Royaume d'Arda et son Evangelisation au XVII^{e} siecle (Paris: Institut d'Ethnologie, 1929), p. 5. In connection with the previous statement of Saint-Mery, the truth is, there were "several places called Ardra, Great Ardra, Little Ardra, etc." (Akinjogbin, p. 214). This occurred "if, after a lapse of time, a group of people later settled in the previously deserted town who would then revive the old name without depriving the new settlement of the same name," (p. 214). In addition to that, the Europeans applied the same name of Ardra to several places of the lowlands of the current Dahomey. Before 1730, the Europeans called the current Allada, Great Ardra, and current Godomey, Little Ardra. After 1730 and particularly from about 1760, they applied the same names to two other places. Porto Novo was called Little Ardra, and Great Ardra, the town of Ajase, twenty-four miles north of

Porto-Novo. This name then covered almost the whole south-eastern part of modern Dahomey. See Labouret and Rivet, p. 10, and esp. Akinjogbin, p. 214. The same name scattered over this area and attributed to several places in the same region should then caution us not to identify too easily the Haitian term Rada with Allada, Ardra or Arda. The truth could be that the Adja gathered their vodun under the name Rada (Arda), and joining others from the Coast of Slaves; the Orisa of the Yoruba, or the bosom of the Ashanti. This happened because of the several places with the same name, and the similarities in the mythology and ritual coming from a community of tradition. Again the name would not have had precisely this historical connotation with Allada, the Haitian authors tied to this word Rada, by referring to Allada. The meaning of the word rather refers to the group acknowledged as good spirits in Haitian pantheon, tending to create the same semantic contrast with the lwa Congo and Petro in the complex rit Rada versus rit Congo and rit Petro the name of Danhonmen contrasts with Congo. In this sense, the word would be again only a lexeme uprooted out of its limited historical semantic reference.

[45]Agbe is the name of the squirrel. To means river, woyo, huge. The name refers to the myth of the origin of the sea. The squirrel urinated, and the sea sprang out of it. This explained the sea as habitat of vodun Agbe.

[46]Ouidah had several appellations in the past, Glexwe, Weda, Juda, Fida, Fweda, etc. See Akinjogbin, p. 213; Agbo, p. 14-15; Philip D. Curtin, The Atlantic Slave Trade, A Census (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), "Table 55," p. 192.

[47]See Levi-Strauss, "Magic et religion," p. 183-268; Luc de Heusch referring to Claude Levi-Strauss and Marcel Mauss, reminded, "symbolic thought refers to communication," and therefore, is a language. See his "Introduction," in R.E. Bradbury and C. Geertz, ed., Essais d'Anthropologie religieuse, trans. Cécile de Rouville (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), p. 7-16, esp. p. 12.

[48]This sends us back to the role of African mythologies in the war of independence of San Domingo. The slaves went to the battlefield not only with their fire-arms, but also with their worldview, that is, myth, sorcery, witchcraft. Voodoo played its role in giving cohesion to the group. See Guérin Montilus, "Haiti: un cas - temoin de la vivacité des religions africaines. Et pourquoi?" in Diop. p. 289-309, esp. p. 290-99.

[49]This is an "exaggeration" of local cultural patterns in times of crisis of oppression by foreign forces, see Georges

Balandier, "La notion de 'situation' coloniale," and "Changements sociaux chez les Ba-Kongo du Congo," in his Sociologie actuelle de l'Afrique noire, 2nd ed. (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1963), p. 3-38; 285-520. In such a hot atmosphere, prophetism and millenarism as a response to oppression come in the most natural way. Local models are rejuvenated for the sake of social survival of the local group.

[50]Such was the role of the blood convenant ceremony at Le Bois Caiman, on August 14, 1791, seven days before the general revolt, August 21, 1791. See Dr. J.C. Dorsainvil, Histoire d'Haiti (Port-au-Prince, Haiti: Henri Deschamps, 1934), p. 66-67. It reminds one of the Adja convenant called vodun nunu ("drinking vodun"); see Hazoume, p. 144.

[51]See Barthes, p. 124.

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